A new look at old Arbroath

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Introduction

(Italicised letters in brackets in the text refer to Illus 3; italicised numbers in brackets in the text refer to the Gazetteer and Illus 6.)

Arbroath is a former royal burgh on the North Sea coast of Angus and was one of those chosen for study in the first series of the Scottish Burgh Survey (Simpson and Stevenson 1982). Its medieval street plan still survives despite industrial development in the late 18th and 19th centuries and more recent redevelopment of the town centre in the 1980s, as well as the construction of a new bypass, Burnside Drive, around the western edge of the town centre. Archaeological investigations in advance of these more recent developments have provided an insight into the extent of survival of features and deposits that may be of archaeological interest. These investigations were initially conducted by the Lunan Valley Project, funded by the Manpower Services Commission; subsequently they were largely the work of the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust Ltd, funded by Historic Scotland and others, and their results, as well as those of other field-work, are assessed here.

Location and topography (Illus 1 and 3)

Arbroath developed around the precinct of the medieval abbey on the main coast road between Dundee and Aberdeen, some 17 miles east of Dundee and 14 miles south of Montrose. The medieval burgh was located on the east side of the Brothock Burn, where it flowed into the North Sea, although growth of the burgh since the 18th century has led to expansion beyond the medieval confines. The initial settlement along High Street lay on the gently sloping ground between the shore and the abbey, situated on an eminence to the north (Illus 2 and 4). To the east is the hilly ground of Boulzie Hill, Ponder Law and Horologe Hill.

In the late 17th century, and again in the mid-18th century, Arbroath was described as basically a single main street, High Street, with a number of lesser streets (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 24). The rigs or burgess properties which stretched back from the street frontage appear to be of irregular lengths. Marketgate and West Newgate Street may have developed as back lanes to the west and east of the rigs stretching back from the southern end of High Street, but if so then the rigs would have been of unequal lengths, those on the east side being longer than those on the west side. This probably reflects the fact that they were laid out at different times. Land on Marketgate was being feued out from 1331, and Newgate had tenements on its west side in 1513 (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 23), but was largely undeveloped by 1822 (Illus 5). Gravesend also acted as a back lane on the west side of High Street to the north of Marketgate, but there was no corresponding back lane on the east side of High Street at this point because of the presence of the abbey precinct wall (C). In 1483 the following streets were mentioned: Millgate, Aldmarketgate, Seagate, Applegate and Cobgate / Covgate (the latter now part of High Street) (Arbroath Liber, ii, 194-6). Horners Wynd (now Commerce Street) and Brydoks Wynd (unidentified) were also in existence in the 15th century; by then the burgh had already expanded to the west side of the Brothock Water where Millgate and Grimsby were sited (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 23).

Archaeological evidence for the burgh’s development is still fragmentary, but recent excavations at the corner of Ladybridge and Marketgate (6) have produced interesting results. A cobbled road surface crossed the development site, suggesting that, before this end of Marketgate was developed in the early 15th century, the roadway between Marketgate and Ladybridge crossed this area. The
Illus 1. Location plan.
excavation confirmed that Marketgate was surfaced in the 14th century, soon after the feuing of the first plots in 1331. Feuing progressed southwards in the course of the 14th century, reaching the southern end of the street about the end of the century, when a purpose-built harbour was first constructed. Consequent on the development of the street was the narrowing of the roadway (Falconer 1995).

Evidence that the road surface of High Street was also wider than it is today has been found at two sites (7 and 10). An earlier road surface, some 0.6m below the present road surface of High Street, has been observed (17). Encroachment on the east side of High Street has also taken place at the south-west corner of the abbey precinct wall, which followed a diagonal course from the post-Reformation parish church (E) to the junction of Abbot Street and High Street (Illus 3 and 5).

**Pre-burghal settlement**

William the Lion founded the Abbey of Arbroath for Tironensian monks in 1178, granting it, among other endowments, the shire of Arbroath (Barrow 1971, 250). The use of the term ‘shire’ implies that Arbroath was an old royal estate centre, the focus of a number of farming and, along the coast, fishing communities, whose tenants would have provided food renders and labour services to the king or his representative, the thane or sheriff, at a royal hall. The location of this putative hall is unknown,
Illus 3. Plan of historic sites and monuments.
but it would presumably have been situated on higher ground away from the low-lying shore, probably on the site of the later abbey, assuming that both were situated on the best available site. The place-name Arbroath means 'mouth of the Brothock' and is, apparently, a hybrid Pictish (aber, mouth) and Gaelic (bruth, heat, whence brothach, boiling) term (Nicolaisen 1976, 164; Watson 1926, 449), implying an origin in the 9th-11th centuries after the takeover by Kenneth MacAlpin of the Pictish kingdom in 843 (Nicolaisen 1976, 156). The parish church for Arbroath until the Reformation was at St Vigeans, about a mile to the north, where a large collection of sculpted stones, dated c 700-900 (Duke 1872; Oram 1996, 85 and 98-9), reveals that this was formerly an important early ecclesiastical site, probably contemporary with the pre-burghal settlement. No archaeological remains, whether structural or artefactual, from any pre-burghal settlement at Arbroath have so far been found. However, three long cist graves (26 and 27) in Ladyloan, at the south-west approach to the burgh, are of a type which is generally dated to between the 5th and 8th or 9th centuries (Henshall 1956, 269); they may, therefore, have been part of the cemetery of a community dependent on the shire hall.

The burgh (Illus 3)
In his foundation charter of the abbey, William gave the monks the right to found a burgh, to have a harbour and to hold a weekly market on Saturday (Barrow 1971, 250). The burgh was evidently founded shortly after, since King John of England (1199–1216) granted the abbot, monks and burgesses of Arbroath the privilege of freedom from toll and custom in all English ports except London (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 1). Civic government is evident by 1214 when two witnesses to a deed were described as provosts of Arbroath, a title probably equivalent to bailie, and the burgh had acquired its own common seal, distinct from the abbey’s, by 1394 (ibid, 2).

Although it was not created a royal burgh until 23 November 1599 (Young 1993, 769), being still a burgh in barony of the abbot of Arbroath, the burgh of Arbroath was represented in parliament from 1579 and was admitted to the Convention of Royal Burghs in 1588 (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 1, 3).

The burgh was laid out to the south of the abbey, near the shore, and gradually extended northwards towards the abbey. Whether or not the early burgh was successful is not clear. In 1318, when a piece of ground in Cobgate (the southern end of High Street) was being feued by the abbey, the tenant, Geoffrey 'Clubbydeued', was required to 'cause the said land to be built in front according to the custom of the burgh within the first three years' (Arbroath Liber, i, 302). This suggests that there were vacant plots on the frontage of the prime street of the burgh over a century after its foundation, although it is possible that any previ-
ous building on the site had been destroyed in the Wars of Independence.

The precinct wall (C) of the abbey extended southwards along the east side of High Street, formerly Eleemosynary Street, as far as Kirk Square, limiting expansion in that area until the 18th century. The southern end of Eleemosynary Street, named after the abbey’s almonry or eleemosynary (f), was formerly wider, but has been encroached on by building development. The former width of the street can be determined from Wood’s plan of 1822 (Illus 5). The west side of High Street, north of Lordburn and Panmure Street, is said to have been outside the burgh’s jurisdiction until 1557, being part of the lands of the almonry of the abbey (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 4, but see below). The burgh was never large and probably, like most other burghs, was always dependent on its rural hinterland: by 1517 it contained about 200 hearths and was inhabited by husbandmen, labourers and a few merchants (ibid, 2), while in 1742 the burgh contained only 250 houses (ibid, 24). There does not seem to have been much expansion of the burgh between these dates.

Taxation records show that, of the Angus burghs, Arbroath always ranked behind Dundee, Montrose and Brechin, but ahead of Forfar. Arbroath first participated in national taxation in 1483 when it was stented at £2, while Montrose and Forfar paid £5-6s-8d and £1-6s-8d respectively (ibid, 3), and Brechin and Dundee paid £4 and £26-13s-4d (Gourlay and Turner 1977, 3). In 1557, when the Scottish burghs were asked to contribute £10,000 towards the costs of the marriage of Mary, Queen of Scots, and the Dauphin (later Francis II) Arbroath was assessed at £135, Montrose at £270 and Dundee at £1265-11s (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 3). In 1597 Arbroath was stented at 13s-4d (Simpson and Turner 1981, 2), while Dundee paid £10-15s, Montrose 32s and Brechin 23s (Gourlay and Turner 1977, 4); Forfar paid 6s-8d (Simpson and Turner 1981, 2). In 1645, to pay for the army of
the Covenanters, Arbroath was expected to provide ten men and a monthly payment of £190, while Montrose provided 53 men and £477 per month (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 3), and Forfar provided six men and £54 (Simpson and Stevenson 1981, 2).

It was not until the second half of the 18th century that the burgh began to expand beyond its medieval confines. By 1754 the town council had been granted the abbey precinct from the crown, and East and West Abbey Streets were laid out thereafter (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 24). By 1764 the lands of Grimsby, west of the Brothock and north of the new harbour of 1724–25 (see below), were being developed, and further expansion west of the Brothock is evident by 1822 (Illus 5). Expansion of the burgh continued in the 19th century to the west, north and east.

The abbey (Illus 3)
The Tironensian Abbey of St Thomas the Martyr, a daughter house of Kelso Abbey, was founded in 1178 by William the Lion in honour of Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, and dedicated in 1233. The church was cruciform in plan, with an aisled nave of nine bays, an aisled choir of three bays, a presbytery, and transepts with eastern chapels. Over the crossing of the nave and transepts was a central tower, and there were two other towers at the western end of the nave (Fawcett 1994a). The cloisters and domestic buildings were on the south side of the nave, with a kitchen court beyond (Mackie and Cruden 1982).

As befitting a royal foundation, the abbey was richly endowed, with an income in 1561 of £10,924 Scots, second only to the cathedral priory at St Andrews (Cowan and Easson 1976, 66). A total of 34 parish churches in Scotland were appropriated to it, as well as Haltwhistle in England, the highest total for any monastic house in Scotland (McNeill and Nicholson 1975, 38, 142–7). (Kelso's total of 37 included 14 appropriated to its daughter cell at Lesmahagow (ibid.)) Twenty-four of the churches were granted by the founder, William the Lion (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 9). The abbot acquired mitred status in 1396 (Cowan and Easson 1976, 67), becoming entitled to wear a mitre and ring and to some of the rights and privileges of a bishop (Sanderson 1986, 21). In addition, the abbey's estates were held in regality, that is, they were exempt from the criminal jurisdiction of the king's judges and the abbot could repledige (i.e., recall to his own court) its tenants from the king’s courts (ibid., 21–2).

The most famous of the abbots was Bernard, mistakenly called de Linton (Lynch 1992, 126), chancellor of Scotland under Robert I (1306–29) and reputed author of the Declaration of Arbroath. This letter to Pope John XXII, sent in the name of the barons of Scotland in 1320, was, in reality, an appeal to the pope to lift the sentence of excommunication against Robert I. It has captured popular imagination as an important constitutional statement through the simplicity of its language, which combined a mythological history of the Scots, a compelling view of the relationship between the kings of Scots and the Scottish people and an account of the Scots' struggle for freedom against the English. While the letter failed in its immediate aim, it did lead to a successful diplomatic campaign by the Scots which resulted in papal recognition of Robert I as king of Scots and the granting by the pope of permission for the anointing of Scottish kings at their enthronement (ibid, 111, 126–7).

The abbey's wealth attracted covetous eyes and in 1473 the abbey was granted in commendam to Patrick Graham, Archbishop of St Andrews, the first of a line of commendators to enjoy the monastery's revenues (Mackie and Cruden 1982, 28). Later commendators included James IV's brother, James Stewart, Archbishop-elect of St Andrews (1502–04), and his illegitimate son, James Stewart, Earl of Moray (1514–17), the latter being a layman appointed at the age of 15 (ibid., 29). Between 1517 and 1551 the commendatorship was held by three successive members of the Beaumont family (Fawcett 1994b, 120).

After the Reformation in 1560 the abbey fell into disuse, being quarried for building purposes elsewhere within the burgh. In 1606 the monastery was dissolved by parliament and all its possessions were secularised by their erection into a temporal lordship in favour of James, 2nd Marquis of Hamilton, son of Lord John Hamilton who had been commendator, with two periods of forfeiture, from 1551 to 1600 (ibid., 29–30). In 1608 the lands of the former abbey were erected into a lordship of parliament by James VI (RMS, vi, 2075).

The ruins of the monastery, which are in the care of Historic Scotland, still convey an impression of its wealth and power. They comprise the west and east ends of the church, the south transept, the sacristy and the abbey gateway at the west end of the church. The Abbot's House, at the junction of the south and west ranges, is the only building of the claustral range to survive intact, because it was used continually after the Reformation; it now houses the abbey museum. The outline of the cloisters and foundations of the pillar bases of the church and some of the domestic buildings have been revealed by excavation and clearance of rubble.

Among the abbey buildings were a 'tower or fortalice ... with ruins' [in 1582] walls called the Nunehous adjacent to the tower, and with the upper house of [the] entry or gate called the Belhous' (RMS, iv, 453) (possibly the gatehouse range). There was also a 'Charterhouse'
(presumably where the abbey's charters were held), whose walls were wasted by 1582, adjacent to which was the burial ground of the monks (ibid, iv, 348).

The abbey was enclosed by a precinct wall, of which the only remains are at the west end of the abbey (Fawcett 1994c, 124), although it was still largely extant in the early 18th century and its approximate course is known. It extended eastwards from the north-east end of the abbey as far as Walker Place, then turned southwards to the Darn Gate (F), an entry into the precinct almost at Academy Street, then westwards to a tower at Kirk Square, then northwards as far as the tower at the west end of the abbey gatehouse range. Much of the area enclosed by the wall was gardens, but there were also a dovecot, a wheat granary and an orchard of 'fruit-bearing trees', as well as a 'common way leading to the marches' (RMS, iv, 453 and 956). Within the precinct was a reservoir fed by a conduit from springs at Hay's Head (OSA, xiii, 41). The ground on the north side of the abbey was in use as the public cemetery long before the Reformation (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 31).

Various stray finds have been recorded from the abbey ruins and precinct (21). An inscribed silver ring was donated to the National Museum of Scotland in 1856, and two personal brass seals of monks from the early 13th century have been found: one, of Robert de Lambile, about 1280, now in Montrose Museum; the other, of W Mathi, in the late 14th century, now in the National Museum of Scotland (ibid, 18). A gaming board, for the game of mereilles, was found incised on a stone built into a post-Refomation wall at the abbey and is now in the abbey museum (Robertson 1966, 322). A portion of lead piping, thought to be from the conduit of the water supply, was found near Abbey Green in 1879 (23) and is now in the National Museum of Scotland (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 18).

In recent times some archaeological field-work has taken place within the original area of the abbey precinct. Excavation in 1982 in backlands behind High Street (I) revealed medieval cultivation that had disturbed a prehistoric burial. A medieval tripod-ower was found. Trial excavation in 1996 between West Abbey Street and East Abbey Street (14) revealed no archaeological remains on a site that had been destroyed by cellars. A watching brief on a development at 11 East Abbey Street in 1994 (20) revealed a medieval garden soil, some 0.6m thick, at a depth below the present ground surface of 0.4m. The results of these pieces of field-work are encouraging in that they have revealed that the medieval garden soil within the precinct has not been totally destroyed and that, therefore, the foundations of any buildings within the precinct (see 23) may still survive. There may also be possible evidence for temporary accommodation for the monks, erected soon after the abbey's foundation but before the construction of the present church at the end of the 12th century. This is suggested by the possible remains of a smaller church, built soon after the abbey's foundation, incorporated into the later, much grander structure (Fawcett 1994b, 42).

The harbour (Illus 3)

Although the monks were granted the right to have a harbour in the foundation charter of the abbey, no purpose-built port seems to have been constructed until 1394. Until then ships had presumably anchored at the shore near the mouth of the Brothock Burn. The 1394 harbour was situated at Old Shore Head (P), but its exposed position rendered it unattractive to ships. In 1528 the harbour was in need of repair, the inhabitants of the burgh being ordered to clear it of sand and stones, and the following year timber was bought for the harbour. However, work did not start until 1530, when James V ratified the grant to the abbey of the great customs on all merchandise in the burgh, port and regality of Arbroath, which had been interfered with by the officials of his predecessors to the disrepair of the harbour and consequent impoverishment of the burgh (RMS, iii, 889). Further repairs to the harbour were effected in 1591 and in the 17th century.

It was not until 1724–25 that another, more sheltered harbour was built on the west side of the Brothock. Spoil from the excavation of this harbour was dumped off the shore as Ballast Hill to form an outer pier or breakwater. The new harbour was affected by silting and recurrent storm damage, necessitating repairs in the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1839 it was improved and enlarged as a result of pressure from ship owners and coastal erosion, part of Ballast Hill having been swept away by the sea in 1822. In the late 19th century the new harbour was rebuilt and converted into a wet dock (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 8, 35–7).

Economy and society

As an early shire centre, Arbroath would have acted as a focal point for the collection of the produce (crops, livestock and, from coastal settlements, fish) of the territory dependent on it for the consumption of the king and his court on their periodic visits. Any surplus produce could have been sold or exchanged for other products. The shire centre could also have acted as a place of small-scale craftwork and the manufacture of raw materials into finished articles. It is, therefore, likely that there was already a tradition of producing and manufacturing for sale and exchange before 1178, on however small a scale, which would have formed the basis of the later
burgh's market.

The primary function of a burgh was to act as a centre for internal and external trade. To that end it had a monopoly on trade over its hinterland, which for Arbroath was presumably its shire. In addition to a weekly market on Saturday, William the Lion, in his foundation charter to the abbey, granted the burgesses of Arbroath freedom from toll and custom throughout his land and at his harbours for all the merchandise that they bought or sold (Barrow 1971, 251). King John of England granted them similar exemption in all English ports except London (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 1). Despite this encouragement, the lack of a proper harbour before 1394 must have had a constraining effect on the development of maritime trade, which was probably never a major component of the burgh's economy. Instead the burgh was more likely to have been heavily dependent on its rural hinterland or on fishing.

In the mid-14th century the burgh was exporting sacks of wool, woolfells (fleeces) and hides (Webster 1982, 457), and these probably remained the principal exports for the medieval period. Before 1736 the burgh had little trade except in fishing and smuggling, importing only a small quantity of timber from Norway. For other imports, such as flax, iron and cloth, it was dependent on Montrose and Dundee (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 3). The construction of the new harbour had a stimulating effect on the burgh's trade, and by 1742 there was trade to America, the Baltic, France, Holland and Norway, as well as coastal and coal trading (OSA, xiii, 39).

At the end of the 18th century Arbroath was importing flax and hemp from Russia, wood and iron from Norway and Sweden, and coal (also destined for Brechin and Forfar) grain and shells for lime (ibid, 26).

Archaeological evidence of overseas trade for Arbroath is largely confined to imported pottery sherds of Yorkshire / Scarborough ware and German stoneware found in excavations at the corner of Marketgate / Ladybridge (6).

The buildings of the inhabitants were probably, initially at any rate, built of stave and wattle with thatched roofs, similar to those found in excavations in Perth and Aberdeen. No trace of such wooden buildings has, however, been found during any of the archaeological investigations that have taken place so far in Arbroath. The excavation at Marketgate / Ladybridge did uncover the foundations of a stone building of the early 15th century, which survived into the early 19th century. The longevity of the building, coupled with the high quality of the imported pottery, suggests that it was first built and owned by a wealthy merchant (Falconer 1995). Possible medieval floor levels of silt and sand were found at 14 High Street (10), as well as the remains of a possible frontage wall line, too fragmentary to interpret. A clay-bonded wall foundation, of possible medieval date, was found at 77–79 High Street (7).

Trade and industry

The creation of the burgh led to the development of various crafts, providing employment to the burgh's inhabitants and adding to its wealth. These crafts were controlled by the seven incorporated trades: smiths, skinners, tailors, weavers, shoemakers, wrights and bakers (OSA, xiii, 39). Of these trades, weaving became particularly important in the 18th and 19th centuries, a number of mills being established on the west side of the Brothock to meet increasing demands for cloth (ibid, 25–6). Shoe making was also a successfully established trade by 1742, and there was a tanning yard in the Greenyard (I). Brewing was established in the burgh by the 18th century (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 27), if not by 1568 when there is mention of a kiln (ustrina), malt mill and great barn, the latter ruined, outside the burgh on the abbey's lands (RMS, iv, 953). North of the abbey was the Smithy Croft, belonging to the abbey's smith, and presumably the site of his workshops.

The burgh mills were situated along a lade fed from the Brothock. The mill of Arbroath is first mentioned between 1202 and 1213, when the inhabitants of the shires of Arbroath and Ethie, who did not have their own mills, were ordered to have their corn milled there (Barrow 1971, 410). Other mills were built along the course of the Brothock between Wardmill to the north of the burgh and the Nether Mill at East Grimsby. In 1660 a windmill was erected to the south-west of the burgh, giving its name to Windmill Hill (Illus 5) (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 11).

Little trace of the burgh's crafts and industries has been found in the archaeological work that has taken place in Arbroath, although four square objects of green glass, approximately one inch (0.03m) high and tapering upwards with a deep circular socket in the top, were found in the foundations of some old houses in St Thomas Street (a lost street name) (ibid, 19–20). They may have been used as linen smoothers in the weaving industry. No evidence of tanning pits was found in the excavations that have taken place in the area of the Greenyard (2 and 5). Excavations on a site at the corner of Marketgate and Ladybridge (6) revealed some pits, cut into the subsoil and sealed by the cobbled surface of Marketgate; these were thought to relate to small-scale activity associated with fishing or fish processing prior to the commercial development of the area in the 14th century (Falconer 1995, 35). Excavations in Hill Place (3) revealed deposits that were thought to be related to fish or mill ponds.
Market area (Illus 3)

The abbey's foundation charter granted it the right to hold a market every Sabbath (Saturday), although no mention is made of a fair to attract merchants from outside the local area. In 1528 the burgesses apparently chose Tuesday to be the new market day (except for the fleshmarket) (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 7). Nevertheless, in 1564 the town council forbade any markets on the Sabbath before 'eight hours' (ibid, 2). When the burgh was erected into a royal burgh in 1599, the weekly market was confirmed as the Sabbath, as in the original foundation charter, and four fairs were granted, on St Thomas' day, St Vigean's day, St John's day, and St Ninian's day (RMS, v, 977). All these days have local significance: the abbey was dedicated to St Thomas à Becket, St Vigean's church had been the medieval parish church for Arbroath, and there had been two local chapels dedicated to St John the Baptist and St Ninian. By 1742 the weekly market had been transferred from Saturday to Thursday and there were three fairs, on St Vigean's Day (20 January), St Ninian's Day (first Wednesday after Trinity Sunday) and St Thomas' Day (7 July) (OSA, xiii, 40). By the 19th century there were only two fairs, largely confined to the sale of shoes and sweetmeats and to revelling (NSA, xi, 107).

It is possible that the burgh's principal market was always situated in High Street, as the former name for the lower part of High Street between the shore and Kirk Wynd was Colegate or Cowgate or Cobgate, first recorded in 1303 (Arbroath Liber, i, 277). This name, if not a corruption of Cowgate (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 22), may be derived from the Scots word 'coft' (to buy) (ibid, 5). In 1392 the abbey was permitted to have a tron, or weighing beam (RMS, i, 863), which was presumably erected in High Street near the market cross (M), not mentioned until 1564 when it was broken. The cross, crowned with a unicorn, was removed in 1746 as an obstruction to traffic (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 7).

In the 14th century a new street, Marketgate, was laid out to the west of, and parallel to, High Street. It was linked to High Street by Horner's Wynd, now Commerce Street, whose former name seems to have been Auld Marketgate to distinguish it from New Marketgate, now Marketgate (ibid, 6). It is not clear what markets were held in these streets, which may have served to relieve pressure on the market area in High Street by providing specialised markets for particular products.

The burgh had been granted the right to a tolbooth (praetorium) in 1599 (RMS, v, 977), where tolls on produce were paid and council business could be conducted, but a reference in 1557 to a praetorium infra burgum de Abirbrothok (ibid, v, 864), if not a reference to the monastery's regality court housed in the abbey gatehouse range, suggests the existence of an earlier building. In 1686 a new tolbooth was built on the east side of High Street (N), near the market cross, from stones quarried from the abbey dormitory (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 10 and 27). In 1779 it was replaced by a new town house on the opposite side of High Street, but the 1686 tolbooth was not demolished until 1864 (ibid, 27).

Parish church (Illus 3)

Before the Reformation the parish church of Arbroath was at St Vigeans, about a mile to the north of the burgh. After the Reformation, St Mary's Chapel (O) was used for a time as the parish church until a new church was built at the south-west corner of the abbey precinct, on precinct land (RMS, iv, 453), between 1580 and 1590. The material used to construct the church was quarried from the abbey dormitory and incorporated into it was a corner tower of the precinct wall. The church was repaired and enlarged throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, until it was destroyed by fire in 1892. The tower was demolished in 1831 and replaced by the existing spire, which survived the fire of 1892. The former Old Parish Church, built in 1895 and now owned by Angus Council, stands on the site. The substantial nature of its foundations, cut into the sloping ground, suggests that little, if any remains of the earlier church are likely to survive (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 28–9). Nevertheless, any future redevelopment of the site or below ground works within it should be monitored for any archaeological remains.

Chapel of St Mary (Illus 3)

This chapel was founded before 1445 and was located at the western end of the Lady Bridge, which spanned the Brothock Water near the shore. There were three altars inside the chapel, including one of St Nicholas (ibid, 23). In 1530 its roof was dilapidated but, although it was stripped of its altars and images at the Reformation, it was fitted up for Protestant worship and served as the parish church of Arbroath until about 1590 when a new church was built elsewhere. Remains of the chapel were still standing in the early 18th century, when they were probably removed during construction of the new harbour in 1725. When that harbour was being enlarged and converted into a wet-dock in 1877, the foundations of the chapel, some mouldings and part of the chapel graveyard were uncovered and destroyed during the construction works. It is, therefore, unlikely that any remains of this chapel now survive (ibid, 33).
Chapel of St Michael and the Almonry (Illus 3)

Attached to the abbey, but outside its precinct, was an almshouse or almonry for the poor, presumably founded with the abbey, although it is unrecorded before 1318, when it had a tenement in Cobgate (Arbroath Liber, i, 302). It is frequently recorded in the 15th and early 16th centuries until 1531, but the date of its suppression is unknown (Cowan and Easson 1976, 169). It was situated to the west of the abbey, in Old Almerie Close, near the junction of High Street and Guthrie Port, and comprised the almoner’s house and garden, offices, stores and warehouses and a range of buildings to house the poor. The almonry had a considerable endowment of land to the west and north of the burgh, from the line of the later Panmure Street and from Lordburn northwards along the west side of High Street (formerly called Eleemosynary Street at this point after the almonry) as far as North Port. It has been claimed that the almonry lands did not form part of the burgh’s jurisdiction until 1557 (cited in Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 4). However, Wood’s plan of 1822 (Illus 5) indicates that almost all of the almonry lands were still outside the burgh boundary at that date, as was the abbey precinct. The lands on High Street / Eleemosynary Street were being feued for development from 1423 and around the site of the later North Port from 1500 (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 23–4 and 33–4); these lands were within the burgh’s boundary.

Situated to the south of the almonry house was the Chapel of St Michael, first mentioned in 1427. It would have become redundant at the Reformation and by 1684/5 had been replaced by a dwelling (ibid., 33–4).

The site of these historic buildings has recently been redeveloped. Archaeological investigations (11 and 16) revealed no evidence of them, the site having apparently been cleared in earlier development, although some residual medieval pottery was recovered and two post-medieval wells were found.

Hospital of St John the Baptist (Illus 1)

This hospital was situated about one mile to the west of the burgh, in the grounds of the present mansion of Hospitalfield. It is first mentioned in 1352 (Cowan and Easson 1976, 169), but was probably the site of the ‘Spedal-feilde’ leased for five years by the abbey in 1325 for 40 shillings to be paid annually to the almonry. The lessees were to build a barn and a byre, each 40 feet (12.1m) long, within a year of their entry. The purpose of the hospital is not clear, nor how long it existed: the ‘Spitalfeild’ and chapel are mentioned in 1464 when an inquisition could not find any information on their origins, only that the field paid rent to the almonry (Arbroath Liber, ii, 142); and only a Chapel of St John is mentioned in 1485 when it was consecrated (ibid., 226). This absence of references to the hospital suggest that it had ceased to function. After the Reformation, Marion Ogilvy, mistress of Cardinal Beaton, Archbishop of St Andrews, and her son, John Beaton, had an interest in the hospital lands (Sanderson 1986, 40), presumably granted by the cardinal who had been commendator of the abbey 1524–46.

The mansion house may incorporate some stones of the hospital, no trace of which now remains. In 1861 and 1889, some 100–120 graves, presumably of the cemetery attached to the hospital, were found during field improvements, but no coffins or shrrouds. The graves were arranged in rows on a sandy hillock (NGR NO 6262 4000) and the skeletons were fully extended with the skulls to the south-west. To the south-east of the burial ground were found the foundations of a building, thought to be the chapel (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 19 and 32–3). In February 1995 skeletal remains of at least six individuals were recovered from the site of the Red Lion Caravan Park (NGR NO 627 420) to the north-east of the earlier find spot (Benvie 1996, 11). Remains of the cemetery and buildings may, therefore, still survive, investigation of which may help to clarify its layout and function.

Chapel of St Ninian (Illus 1)

About a half mile to the east of the burgh, near the shore, were the Chapel and well of St Ninian (OSA, xiii, 40). The chapel was consecrated in 1485, when its altar was dedicated (Arbroath Liber, ii, 226). In 1492 John Tod was granted the right to succeed to the chapel on the death or resignation of the existing chaplain, William Gibboun, and in 1522 David Brown succeeded Master Richard Grant as chaplain. St Ninian gave his name to a fair at Arbroath (see Market Area, above).

Ports and defences (Illus 3)

Arbroath, like most Scottish burghs, had no purpose-built defensive walls. Instead security was provided by head or back dykes situated at the end of each rig and maintained by the property owner. Among the burgh’s officials were dyke prisers, whose task was to see that the boundary walls were kept in good order, and lyners, whose task was to mark off the burgh’s boundaries and keep the marker stones in good order (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 7).
Entry to the burgh was secured by three ports, whose primary purpose was to serve as collection points for tolls on goods entering the burgh. They could also be shut in time of plague to prevent persons with the disease entering the burgh (ibid, 21). Although their general locations are known from street names, the exact positions of the ports are unknown. Nevertheless, the line of the burgh boundary on Wood’s plan of 1822 (Illus 5) may give an indication. The West Port (I), at the end of Millgate, guarded the entry to the burgh from the west; the North Port (G) guarded the roads from Montrose and Brechin; and the Guthrie Port (H) guarded the road from Forfar. However, there seems to have been no ports guarding the two coastal approaches to the burgh from east and west. The latter road, from Dundee, crossed the Brothock Water by Lady Bridge, in existence from at least 1529 (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 8). The Chapel of St Mary (O), which collected tolls on goods crossing the bridge, may have acted as a port. It is not known when the ports were first built, nor when they were removed, apart from the North Port, which was removed in 1764 (ibid, 22).

A battery was erected at the south-east corner of the 18th-century harbour after the bombardment of Arbroath by a French ship commanded by the American privateer, William Fall, in 1781. It was dismantled after the peace of 1814, when Napoleon was exiled to Elba (ibid, 7, 36-7).

Conclusions

The development of medieval Arbroath can be compared to other small burghs in Scotland. Like Dunfermline and Newburgh it was a burgh in barony of a powerful and wealthy abbey, and like Dunfermline the abbey and its burgh succeeded an earlier royal centre. Like Forfar, with Restenneth Priory, its parish church at St Vigeans was located outside the burgh. Like Edinburgh / Canongate, between the castle and Holyrood Abbey, and Elgin, with the castle at one end and the cathedral at the other, it developed as a single street between two foci: the abbey and the harbour. Like most Scottish burghs its medieval limits were not exceeded until the 18th century, and, like most Scottish ports (other than the larger burghs at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee), its trade was small, although it was geographically extensive from Russia to America.

The limited amount of archaeological work so far undertaken in Arbroath has revealed the varying extent of archaeological survival within the historic core of the burgh. On some sites (2, 11 and 14) all traces of archaeological remains had been destroyed by 19th- and 20th-century developments, while on others (4, 5 and 9) the underlying archaeology had partially survived despite such developments. Of particular importance has been the excavation at Marketgate / Ladybridge (6), which has enabled valuable conclusions to be drawn on the development of that part of Arbroath: initial occupation based on possible exploitation of marine resources, succeeded in the 14th century by the laying down of Marketgate, followed in the 15th century by a long-lasting stone building with the evidence of a wealthy merchant owner. Other sites (3, 7, 10 and 15) have shown that archaeological remains can survive, despite later developments, although the small-scale nature of much of the work renders interpretation difficult. Cultivation remains and rubbish dumping in backlands (4, 5, 9, 13, 17 and 18) have also been found.

Some sites (6, 7 and 10) have shown that there has been encroachment on the former street surface of High Street, as has also been found in Perth, eg Perth High Street, King Edward Street (Bowler et al 1995, 936), 80-86 High Street (Moloney 1992, 80) and 103 High Street (Falconer 1992, 80). This successful encroachment on the street contrasts with documentary evidence from other burghs where forestairs that had encroached upon the street were ordered to be demolished, eg Brechin (Gourlay and Turner 1977, 5), although in Kirkcudbright, in 1622, a merchant was allowed to build his tenement into the ‘fair gait’ but not to erect forestairs (Butle and Armet 1958, 257). It is possible that the encroachment on the street frontage represents infilling of a ‘foreland’ in front of the burgage plot which had previously been occupied by a booth for the display of wares or produce for sale. The arcaded frontage of the tenement known as Gladstones Land (dating from the early 17th century) in Edinburgh High Street, and the surviving arcaded shop frontages of late 17th century date along Elgin High Street, also probably represent the incorporation of sites of former booths into the main frontage building.

Recent excavations in Dunbar have revealed evidence of the timber, stone and stone-footed structures, craft industries and economy of a shire centre from the 7th to the 9th centuries and later (Perry, forthcoming a). Remains of the pre-abbey shire centre at Arbroath, as well as of any temporary buildings used by the monks during the construction of the abbey, could survive within the area of the former abbey precinct, where medieval cultivation soils have been found, as well as the remains of foundations of some of the domestic buildings of the abbey (1, 20 and 23). It is also important to see to what extent the evidence of a wealthy merchant class in the 15th century from the excavation at Marketgate / Ladybridge (6) is reflected elsewhere in the burgh. Presumably the feuing of the almory lands in the 15th and early 16th centuries was either the result of increasing
wealth flowing into the burgh, with the abbey trying to maximise its revenues, or an attempt by the abbey to stimulate economic development. Whatever the abbey’s motives, this expansion seems to have come to a halt in the course of the 16th century: Newgate, where farms were being granted in the earlier part of the century, remained largely undeveloped as late as 1822 (Illus 5).

Further work, involving both historical research and archaeological investigation, is needed to clarify Arbroath’s origins and development as well as its crafts and industries. The opportunity to carry this out may arise in the not too distant future, if redevelopment of the many empty and derelict shops in the town centre takes place as part of a renewal of the town’s economy. Any such redevelopment could have a major impact on the archaeology of the town centre and needs, therefore, to be closely monitored. An important part of any future archaeological programme in the burgh would be historical research on surviving medieval records (eg Arbroath Liber, burgh records, protocol books, title deeds) to identify the stages in the burgh’s development and the likely location of early municipal and other buildings.

The objectives for future archaeological and historical research set out in the original Burgh Survey (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 14–5) remain substantially unaltered (only for the almonry and St Michael’s Chapel can it be definitely said that there are no surviving archaeological remains (11 and 16)). These were outlined as the identification of:

- the initial settlement of the burgh, its nature and development;
- the sites and chronology of the town ports;
- the development of the street plan, and any variation in alignment and width of streets;
- the physical nature, construction materials, plan and usage of town buildings before the 18th century and the relation of the buildings to each other and the street frontage;
- the sites, plans and any surviving structural remains of the 16th-century parish church, of the Hospital and Chapel of St John, and of St Mary’s Chapel;
- the course of the precinct wall of the abbey and the relationship between the abbey and the development of the secular settlement;
- any surviving remains of the medieval harbour, earlier landing arrangements and trade.

At least two new objectives can now be added:

- locating any remains of buildings of the rural area outside the abbey;
- identifying the location and nature of the pre-burghal settlement.

The finding of building foundations, presumably of granaries, barns, byres or other farm buildings of the Granter’s or Granitar’s Croft, in Sydney Street (24) suggests that such important agricultural structures may survive in the rural environs of medieval Arbroath, and should be recognised. The latter point is of special interest in Arbroath, because of its suggested role as a pre-burghal shire centre. The question of urban origins in Scotland clearly has a variety of answers, and Arbroath may be a relatively undisturbed example of one of the pathways to urban status, beginning as a shire center, adding a major religious house, and then developing into a small medieval and modern town.

Acknowledgements

The preparation of this paper was wholly funded by Historic Scotland.

Gazetteer (Illus 6)

Excavations

1 189–191 High Street
NO 6435 4108
In 1982 excavation by the Lunan Valley Project of a trench to a depth of about 1m within the abbey precinct revealed that medieval cultivation had disturbed a burial pit with fragmentary remains of a crouched inhumation, probably prehistoric. A medieval bronze tripod ewer was recovered from ground previously cultivated (Pollock 1983, 33).

2 Lordburn / Applegate Street
NO 6420 4103
Excavation by the Lunan Valley Project beside the medieval streets of Lordburn and Applegate in 1983 found traces of buildings no earlier than the early 18th century. Truncation during occupation, particularly in the 20th century, had destroyed most evidence of buildings (Cannell 1983, 33).

3 Hill Place
NO 6440 4100
A small excavation by the Lunan Valley Project in 1983 in a gap site fronting Hill Place recovered a quantity of medieval pottery in water-laid silts associated with fish or mill ponds (Cannell and Pollock 1983, 33).

4 166–178 High Street
NO 6430 4107
In 1986 excavation by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust revealed natural sand on the frontage of High Street. Further to the west was an early modern well and cobble pavement. At the west end of the site an old ground surface was located, sealed by 1.4m of hill wash and garden soil. Finds included medieval pottery as well as clay pipes (Bowler 1986, 41–2).

5 200–212 High Street
NO 6429 4111
Excavation in 1986 by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust at the rear of 200–212 High Street revealed only natural sand along the High Street and Applegate frontages. The ground sloped gently down from east to west, while on the northern part of the site natural sand was covered by a buried soil horizon and cut by a boundary ditch (Illus 7). The ditch
Illus 6. Plan of previous work.
deposits contained medieval pottery. The fills of the ditch were sealed by garden soil. Further to the west was a group of medieval and modern pits (Bowler 1986, 42).

6 Marketgate / Ladybridge Street NO 6427 4069
Trial excavation in October 1993, followed by full excavation in December 1993, by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust revealed some 0.5m of deposits. Features cut into natural subsoil may be related to exploitation of marine resources. These were sealed by Marketgate, which had been surfaced with cobbles in the 14th century, before the street was encroached on by stone structures in the late 15th century. That these structures survived into the 19th century and the high quality of imported pottery recovered both suggest that the structures were first owned and built by wealthy merchants (Falconer 1995).

7 77–79 High Street NO 6438 4083
Trial excavation by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust in 1996, followed by excavation in 1997, revealed some 0.3m of archaeological deposits. A cobbled surface (illus 8), of a formerly wider High Street, extended some 1.8m behind the present wall frontage and was bounded in the northern half of the site by an earlier frontage represented by a clay-bonded wall, some 1.2m wide, with a stone floor. A pit, 1m deep, truncated by the present street frontage, was cut into natural subsoil and sealed by the later cobbled surfaces of High Street. In the southern half of the site a stepped cobbled surface was used for metal-working. Two architectural stone fragments, a whetstone, animal and fish bone, shells and metalwork, including one coin, as well as modern glass, were recovered. A post-medieval cobbled path, leading from High Street to the backland, may have been a close between frontage buildings. Medieval occupation of the site was dated by pottery to the 12th-15th centuries (Perry, forthcoming b).

Trial excavations

8 69–71 High Street NO 6441 4082
Trial work by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust in the garden area to the rear of this site in April 1992 revealed garden soil, 0.40m deep, which contained residual medieval pottery. Modern demolition rubble was encountered in the trench adjacent to the building (Cachart 1992, 72).

9 James Street / Church Street NO 641 412
In 1993 trial excavation was undertaken by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust on the site of the former Palace Cinema between James Street and Church Street, to the south of the former Chapel of St Michael and the almonry. The excavations revealed that construction of a 19th-century hall and a later cinema with a basement had removed all archaeological deposits from the north-west part of the site (James Street). Away from these buildings, on the south side of the site (Church Street), a 1.10m deep layer of garden soil, probably medieval cultivation soil, containing medieval pottery, was recorded. No trace of the almonry complex or the chapel was found (Cachart 1993, 94).

10 14 High Street NO 6442 4068
Trial excavation by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust on the frontage of the former Baptist Church Mission Hall in 1993 revealed that behind the High Street frontage were the remains of a cobbled surface, formerly part of the High Street surface. An earlier building line was found on the west side of the cobbles along with an interior surface with associated medieval pottery. This excavation showed that important medieval remains can still exist under today’s frontage buildings. It also revealed that during the medieval period this section of the High Street was much wider than it is today (Cachart 1993, 94).

11 16 Guthrie Port NO 6417 4131
Trial excavation by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust in 1993 revealed that the site had been greatly disturbed by 19th-century construction and 20th-century demolition. The area also appeared to have been scarped as a result of this activity, reducing the natural sand subsoil profile. No archaeological deposits, features or artefacts were discovered (Mackenzie 1994, 80).
12 Cliffburn Road  NO 647 411
In 1994 trial excavation by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust in the nursery garden in advance of development demonstrated that the nearby cist burial ground (22) did not extend into the proposed development area (Cachart 1994, 80–1).

13 51–53 High Street  NO 6441 4078
In June 1994 trial work by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust in the fish processing yard at the rear of this property found archaeological deposits at a depth of 0.45m below modern levels. The deposits had a combined thickness of 0.40m and overlay natural beach deposits. They comprised silty clays with stones and contained some sherds of medieval pottery (Hall 1994, 80).

14 Old and abbey parish church  NO 6435 4116
Trial excavations by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust in 1996 revealed that this site had undergone substantial modern disturbance. All but a 1m strip, at the southern extent of the site, appeared to have been destroyed by cellars, removing all possible archaeological remains (Mackenzie 1996).

Watching briefs

15 West end of abbey  NO 6424 4133
A medieval midden was identified outside the west end of the abbey in 1963 when some 17th-century buildings were demolished. To the rear of the buildings was a steep bank, behind which was the wall of the abbey burial ground. The bank contained bones, stones, burnt debris and pottery of a late medieval date. This feature remained unexcavated. Some medieval pottery sherds were found amongst the debris of the demolished houses (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 19).

16 Guthrie Port / Burnside Drive  NO 641 413
A large area between Burnside Drive and Guthrie Port was cleared for development in 1989. An archaeological watching brief by Angus District Museums and Archaeological Operations and Conservation on the site produced medieval pottery, metalwork and coins. Two wells were found, both post-medieval. One appeared to be for domestic use and the other for municipal use. House foundations and a fireplace were also recorded (Lowe 1989, 62; Eames 1989, 62).

17 115–125 High Street  NO 6439 4092
In 1992 a watching brief by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust on a large backland site revealed deep garden soil up to 2m deep overlying natural gravel. Several sherds of medieval pottery were found in the lowest levels of soil. A well was located to the rear of 115 High Street. A pipe trench down the vennel and out into High Street located 0.40m of archaeological deposits up to and across the street.
frontage, from which several sherds of early medieval pottery were recovered. In High Street a possible early road surface was observed 0.60m below modern ground level (Hall and Cachart 1992, 72).

18 104–108 High Street
NO 6428 4094
A watching brief by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust in 1992 on three trenches in the open backland of this property revealed a garden soil just over 1m deep, which merged with a natural grey clay. One unstratified sherd of medieval pottery was retrieved. Within the standing building at 104 High Street, about 18m to the west of the frontage, a cobbled and brick well was found. It was considered to be a domestic well dating from the 19th century (Cachart 1992, 72).

19 24 Seagate
NO 6454 4070
A watching brief by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust in April 1993 on contractor’s trenches in the rear garden area of this property revealed two layers of garden soil with a combined depth of 1.10m, over natural beach deposits. The base of the wall on the west side of the garden was 0.80m below the surface, suggesting that further soil had been imported after wall construction. No medieval archaeological deposits were identified (Cachart 1993, 94).

20 11 East Abbey Street
NO 6448 4110
In 1994 a watching brief by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust was undertaken on a small extension at the rear of a property within the former abbey precinct. A lower garden / cultivation soil, probably contemporary with the life of the abbey and at least 0.60m thick, was identified at a depth of 0.40m below the modern garden surface (Cachart 1994, 81).

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Duke, W 1872 ‘Notice of the fabric of St Vigeans Church, Forfarshire; with notice and photographs of early sculptured stones building (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 18 and 32).

24 Sydney Street
NO 644 414
About 1879 stone foundations were found, thought to be from some of the abbey’s domestic buildings (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 32). However, as they were outside the abbey precinct, they may have been farm buildings of the Granitar’s Croft.

25 Orchard Street
NO 639 412
Excavations in Orchard Street earlier this century led to the disinterment of skulls and other bones probably associated with the Battle of Arbroath between the Ogilvys and the Lindsays in 1445 (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 19).

26 Ladyloan
NO 640 404
In July 1980, workmen discovered two extended inhumations in slab-constructed long cists. The cists were aligned east to west. No artefacts were found (Sherriff 1980, 38).

27 Ladyloan
NO 639 403
Digging operations at the site of a new sewage pumping station on the foreshore resulted in the destruction of a long-cist burial. The adult inhumation lay in cist of sandstone slabs and only 0.40m of the east end of the east-to-west-orientated grave survived (Sherriff 1984, 37).

Chance finds

21 Abbey ruins
NO 643 413
Clearance of rubble from the abbey ruins has produced a silver ring brooch, inscribed ‘I ’ IACR ASCR A • SR; and personal brass seals of two monks, Robert de Lambile and W Mathi. A stone gaming board for mereilies was found built into a post-Reformation wall (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 18 and 19).

22 Ponder Law
NO 6477 4115
Several stone cists orientated east-west and containing crouched skeletons were discovered here some time before 1859. The cists probably date from the Bronze Age (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 17).

23 Abbey Green
NO 644 413 (approx)
A fragment of lead piping, found near the Abbey Green in 1879, is thought to have formed part of a conduit carrying water to a monastic reservoir situated to the south of the abbey. Also found were the foundations of some of the abbey’s domestic buildings (Simpson and Stevenson 1982, 18 and 32).
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This paper is published with the aid of a grant from Historic Scotland.

Abstract

Archaeological excavations and research in the historic town of Arbroath since the early 1980s have provided some insights into the origins and character of the medieval burgh and demonstrated the continuing potential for survival of archaeological remains. Early burials (one prehistoric and three possibly early Christian) and structural remains of late medieval stone buildings have been found, as well as evidence of property boundaries, domestic occupation in the form of floors and pits, and cultivation of backlands. The nature of the pre-burghal settlement, the burgh’s development and economy and the role of the abbey are all subjects for continuing research.

Keywords: Arbroath, abbey, urban growth
Arbroath Abbey founded in 1178, with the High Street leading to the Abbey gatehouse on the right.